Greg Hundermark

Mrs. Dianne Krause

GRIT 687

June 27, 2012

Technology and the Administrator: An Interview with Arlen Mummau

In Kinzers, Pennsylvania, there is a small and rural school district that historically has garnered little media attention, aside from its name being alluded to in several publications following the October 2006 *West Nickel Mines Amish Schoolhouse* shooting (several victims of the attacks resided in the school district). Within the past two years however, Pequea Valley School District has once again garnered media attention, but this time it is for a very different reason.

In the 2011-2012 school year, Pequea Valley High School adopted a 1:1 laptop initiative. The initiative granted each student access to a MacBook, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. One of the top advocators for this endeavor was Arlen Mummau, head principal at Pequea Valley High School. For Mummau, technology was something that impacted him all throughout the different stages of his life, and so it only seemed natural that he supported the initiative. In a sit-down interview with the head principal, I was able to gain further insight into how technology has impacted him both on a personal level and as an educational leader.

Although it may now feel like the distant past for Mummau, PV’s principal was eager to share several examples of how technology impacted him as a youth. Mummau first recalled being captivated by the black and white television, which his grandparents bought for him when he was just six years old. Mummau explains, “We watched the first space shuttle land. In hindsight, that’s an opportunity technology provided for me - that I wouldn’t have otherwise been able to experience”. With regard to education, Mummau reminisced about a technology that assisted him in his earlier years of teaching, and one that is now all but extinct: The Videocassette recorder.

For Mummau, the VCR changed the way he delivered instruction, since it was preceded by an 8mm slideshow, which he described as bland and trite. Mummau elaborates, “With videotapes, I liked that I could start and stop, and there could be interaction with the students”. He then recalled a particular lesson, which involved the viewing and deconstruction of the Amish-centric, Hollywood blockbuster film, *Witness*, starring Harrison Ford. “[When showing *Witness]* we were able to closely examine what could and could not have happened in their culture. We were able to break all those things down”. After inquiring about how technology in education has progressed since the VCR, Mummau described the evolution of accessing information. “At one point, every teacher had a set of encyclopedias and dictionaries. People hoarded those things…now I don’t know a single teacher who has them. With the popularization of the Internet, information is so much more accessible and user friendly for the teacher and the student”. At this point, it seemed only natural to shift the focus of our conversation to PV’s 1:1 initiative and Mummau’s current attitude toward technology in education, which is not without its reservations.

One concern Mummau has is with respect to the quality of education his teachers deliver, which he communicated through a series of questions. Mummau ponders, “There can be a lot of stuff going on, but are teachers teaching? We have a lot of access to stuff, but you gotta be careful. A lot of the stuff kids are doing in class can just as easily been done at home [he cites Empower 3000 & ALEKS as examples]. Can the kids think with/without the technology? Are we getting a better product? These are the things that concern me”.

While Mummau expressed some of his concerns for teacher’s abilities to integrate technology into their instruction, he was adamant not to discredit what the 1:1 initiative has offered PV’s students. He contends, “Another thing I see here is that we teach a ton of kids in poverty, and the technology we offer them has done a ton. It may be hard to measure this, but the management piece (saving, organizing,) should not be understated. If you want to write a resume, properly format a bibliography, here’s how you do it. How can you discount that?”. Mummau also spoke about the impact PV’s 1:1 initiative has had its teachers, and he focuses largely on assessment.

Mummau is not shy when it comes to advocating for data-driven instruction, and he maintains that the opportunities technology offers for summarization activities and assessment are plenty. Mummau states, “The instant feedback [students and teachers] can get with technology is impressive. I have spoken to teachers who told me they thought they were teaching a good lesson, and then they looked at the data offered to them through technology, and that was sometimes a real eye-opener for them”. After processing Mummau’s reservations and passion for the initiative, I inquired about the efforts he makes to ensure that our teachers are taking advantage of the opportunities technology presents for instructors and their learners. His response was representative of an educational leader.

Mummau first referenced our district’s mission statement, which is “…to create an environment for every student to excel”. He then explained that when he is contacted by other school districts about the initiative, he stresses that simply handing each student a laptop is not going to solve any of their problems. Instead, building and maintaining an environment that is united, full of experimentation, and backed by research and pedagogy is ideal. He adds, “As an instructional leader, you need to provide nourishment and leadership for your teachers. We made a lot of mistakes… At times we pushed teachers too much. There’s an important experimental period where you have to give teachers time to try different outlets and to explore…but at the end of the day, if teachers want to improve, there are opportunities to”.

Additionally, when it comes to leadership, Mummau is a proponent of delegation. He admits, “I am just one guy, and so I think you make a lot of leaders. Who I can touch and relate to is different than who another leader can… and so you identify other leaders and you let them get out there and help our district meet our goals… I’m optimistic about the direction in which we are headed”. When pressed about the future of education and our district, Mummau offered several incites, mostly regarding the potential for technology to shift the way stakeholders traditionally view our educational system.

First, Mummau sees technology helping schools establish themselves as specialized institutions for specific domains and skills sets. He explains, “Technology has allowed for Pequea Valley to excel in STEM [an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] and also showcase that. As other schools continue to adopt technology, I see these same opportunities being available for them”. Similarly, as schools build their reputations in specialized areas, Mummau envisions the regimented structure of the school day and grade levels getting in the way of progress. He adds, “I think the current structure of the school day is going to change. You and I both know that this is already starting to change…five day work weeks, kids graduating all at the same time – ”. When there was a pause in his response, I asked him to elaborate on how technology might help realize this. Mummau contended, “Technology may help make all of these things become realized because schools used to be the primary outlet for learning, but since we’ve provided our kids with laptops, being in schools bell-to-bell may not be all that necessary”. And with that, Mummau exclaimed one final time that he liked the direction in which we were headed, and I concurred.

Works Cited

"Technology and the Administrator: An Interview with Arlen Mummau." Personal   
 interview. 27 June 2012.